

OFFICER SAFETY BULLETIN

From LASD

Inhalation of hydrogen sulfide has been a popular means of committing suicide in Japan for the past few years. Hydrogen sulfide suicides within the United States have now become popular as well. Unfortunately, this method of committing suicide has great potential for severely injuring or killing first responders. This potential is so great in fact, that the subjects usually leave warning signs so that first responders do not become exposed to the chemical. Hydrogen sulfide, traditionally a confined space gas, is potentially fatal in large concentrations and can cause immediate collapse. Hydrogen sulfide is a toxic, colorless, flammable gas that can be created by mixing a sulfur source with an acid. Any number of household items can be utilized to create hydrogen sulfide.

In the past 18 months, the HazMat Detail has investigated two hydrogen sulfide suicides and one attempted suicide. The most recent occurred in Castaic on February 23, 2010. In this incident, the subject taped warning signs on the vehicle's windows warning first responders of the hazard. The subject was found in the back seat next to a plastic bucket containing the chemical mixture.

At the August 2008 incident in Pasadena, the subject utilized instructions he had accessed via the internet. The subject locked himself in his car, taped warning signs on both the driver and passenger windows, and proceeded to mix a fungicide and toilet bowl cleaner in a large plastic tray that was placed on the backseat. The subject died before he could pour the second bottle of fungicide into the toilet bowl cleaner. When the car door was opened by hazmat, the hydrogen sulfide level was so high that any exposure would likely have caused death.

In December of 2009, East Los Angeles Station personnel responded to a motel in the City of Commerce regarding a subject who threatened to kill himself utilizing chemicals. The handling deputies were able to detain the subject as he walked from his motel room to his vehicle. The Hazmat Detail's investigation revealed that the subject intended to create hydrogen sulfide to commit suicide utilizing the Japanese method he had found on the internet. Subject statements and physical evidence showed that the subject had previously poured a pesticide into a 5 gallon bucket inside his vehicle and was walking back to his vehicle to complete the process by pouring muriatic acid into the bucket as well. A warning note was found pre-taped on the floor board of the vehicle.

The HazMat Detail is concerned that deputy personnel will respond to one of these incidents, open the door to check the welfare of the occupant, and immediately succumb to the chemical exposure. Any vehicle or small room with the doors and windows closed can be utilized to confine the hydrogen sulfide. Utilizing your departmentally issued Avon respirator to conduct a rescue is NOT a viable option at these incidents as you cannot confirm the chemical utilized or the concentration. Either of these issues may render your respirator useless to you. There has been at least one reported incident where hydrogen cyanide was created in a similar fashion. Department personnel should not open the vehicle door. Request the fire department and the HazMat Detail to respond and handle these incidents for you.